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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LISBON 000423

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SUBJECT: DAS ERIC JOHN IN PORTUGAL TO DISCUSS EAST TIMOR

REF: LISBON 0048

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Classified By: Deputy Pol/Econ Counselor Cari Enav for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) EAP DAS Eric John met with Portuguese officials in Lisbon on February 5 to discuss the situation in East Timor and review military/police operations. All expressed Portugal's desire to work with the international community - particularly with the US and Australia. Portugal was not taking sides in the political conflict but was maintaining lines of communications with all parties, officials said. Several lamented that there was no one strong enough to counter the influence of former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri. Resolving the election issue was paramount, with Ministry of Interior SecState Magalhaes traveling to Dili to help overcome differences and ensure a fair vote. All agreed that international efforts should concentrate on building a viable, well-trained police force and not on the Timorese military. Portugal was considering a UN request to station additional paramilitary police outside Dili despite Magalhaes's apparent frustration with UNMIT.

Meetings

2. (U) EAP DAS Eric John met with Ministry of the Interior State Secretary Jose Magalhaes whose portfolio includes the paramilitary Republican National Guard (GNR) currently stationed in Dili; with MFA Deputy D/G for Foreign Policy Antonio Ricoca Freire; with the Prime Minister's Diplomatic Advisor Jorge Roza de Oliveira; and with Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Vice-President Leonor Coutinho. In addition, the GNR provided a briefing of its operations in East Timor, and DAS John conducted a TV interview on US - Asia relations with popular "Society of Nations" TV host Nuno Rogeiro.

East Timor and Int'l Coordination - A Portuguese Priority

3. (C) Throughout the day, it was evident that the Portuguese had an extreme fondness for East Timor stemming from their colonial period and a keen desire to correct previous mistakes that had inhibited development there. All interlocutors underscored Portugal's desire to work with the international community - particularly with the US and Australia - to stabilize the situation and build a viable

democracy. Portugal was receptive to DAS John's suggestion for Japan to play a more active role in East Timor, with Coutinho mentioning that she had raised the issue herself with the President of East Timor's Parliament.

¶4. (C) Highlighting East Timor's importance to Portugal, Coutinho noted that it was the only foreign policy issue on which all political parties concurred. Ricoca Freire further noted that Portugal had spent over 400 million euros there since 1999. Despite this, Magalhaes lamented that Portugal had not been "pro-active" enough prior to the 2006 riots. The challenge in East Timor was more than just security, all said. Democratic leaders needed to be trained and democratic institutions needed to be built.

Political Readout - No One Strong Enough to Rival Alkatiri

¶5. (C) On the political front, all underscored that Portugal was not taking sides and that it maintained lines of communications with all parties. In fact, the President of East Timor's Parliament had just met with Coutinho on February 5, Ramos Horta was expected to travel to Lisbon on February 14-15, and Magalhaes planned to travel to Dili the week of February 12. That said, several lamented that there was no one strong enough to rival the influence of former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri. President Xanana Gusmao was popular but not a good leader, according to Coutinho. On the other hand, Ramos Horta did not have his heart set on leading the Timorese, according to Magalhaes. Having worked alongside Ramos Horta at the UN, Magalhaes commented that Ramos Horta really wanted to be UN Secretary General. Since that was no longer an option, it was unclear what his true intentions were.

¶6. (C) To complicate matters, East Timor's constitution was inadequate and far too complex for the fledgling nation,

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according to Magalhaes. The way it is currently written favored Mari Alkatiri in his rivalry with Xanana Gusmao. (Note: Magalhaes, a constitutional lawyer, volunteered that the Portuguese had helped draft the East Timorese Constitution, copying large portions from Portugal's Constitution.)

Magalhaes Travels to Dili to Support Election Process

¶7. (SBU) The election issue - in all its forms - was paramount, all concurred. Magalhaes planned to travel to Dili the week of February 12 to help authorities resolve differences in election timing, encourage a fair and transparent vote, and ensure that election results were respected. Since he was traveling in his official capacity, he would only be meeting with government officials, not with Mari Alkatiri.

GNR Maintaining Public Order - Building Police Force

¶8. (C) All Portuguese officials agreed with DAS John that international efforts should concentrate on building a viable, well-trained police force and not on reforming and re-arming the F-FTDL (Timorese military). The briefing by the Republican National Guard (Portugal's paramilitary police) provided an excellent overview of East Timor and a detailed outline of its mission - to maintain public order and train the police. Infantry Regiment Bravo, having served in Iraq and now stationed in Dili, enjoyed excellent community relations with the Timorese and good coordination with the Australians. It consisted of 142 officers and three emergency medical personnel. Magalhaes underscored his close relationship with the regiment, noting that there had already been one rotation since initial deployment in June 2006, that he had personally said goodbye to each officer, and that he was in direct communication with the GNR commander in Dili.

East Timor Requests More GNR

¶9. (C) Magalhaes and Roza de Oliveira informed DAS John that Portugal had just received a request from East Timor via the UN to station additional GNR outside Dili. The government was considering the request but had not made any decision to date. Magalhaes noted that Portugal had spent six million euros on its deployment to East Timor in 2006, a huge expenditure given the country's budgetary problems, and lamented that the UN had not provided reimbursement. He implied that UN funding would play a decisive role in formulating Portugal's response. Magalhaes went on to criticize UNMIT's organization and coordination of all contingents under the UNMIT umbrella.

Focus on Portuguese Language and Judicial System

¶10. (C) Ricoca Freire commented that the Portuguese language could play a unifying role in East Timor, given the numerous dialects there. However, he added, Portugal is also a strong proponent of regional integration. Ricoca Freire emphasized the international community needed to help strengthen the judicial system to promote reconciliation and ensure those responsible for violence were brought to justice. DAS John underscored several times that the USG was working behind the scenes with Indonesia to ensure accountability for the 1999 violence. He noted that laying such groundwork was critical to ensuring accountability for the 2006 violence in East Timor.

Philippines - Seeking EU Technical Support for EJK

¶11. (C) In response to EU criticism, the Philippines had asked the EU for assistance on Extra-Judicial killings (EJK). DAS John requested Portugal support the Philippines's request at all meetings, suggesting that technical assistance would be more beneficial than sending a rapporteur. The Portuguese said they would take it under consideration.

Comment

¶12. (C) DAS Eric John underscored to the Portuguese the importance of international collaboration in East Timor. The Portuguese expressed a clear desire to work with the international community - particularly the US and Australia - on this issue and that our overall objectives are the same.

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Portugal's value-added is its long history lends a unique perspective and its long relationship a special commitment. Recognizing the sensitivity surrounding its desire to see Portuguese become East Timor's official language, Portugal has been working quietly with local schools and Timorese institutions to promote its use. On a broader regional scale, Portugal has also expressed a willingness to coordinate the EU's Asia agenda. Portuguese officials have been traveling throughout Asia including trips to China, Japan and South Korea in preparation for Portugal's EU Presidency later this year. Post will explore DAS John's suggestion for a possible DVC with EAP in advance of the November EU-Asean meeting.

DAS Eric John has cleared this cable.
Hoffman